

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 2, February 2019

www.ijellh.com

Debmalya Chatterjee

Ph.D. Research Scholar,

Rabindra Bharati University,

Chandannagar, West Bengal, India.

debmalylive@gmail.com

Retracing The Vampire And The Abhuman: A Study of Bram Stoker's Dracula

Abstract: The vampire is no longer a mythical creature, rather it a metamorphosed form of the human body biologically. Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's novel Dracula is a good example of the 'abhuman' in this novel. Why the vampire needs to suck blood, how does it evade its definition from boundaries of mythical connotation, how does it disintegrate the human body have been discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Vampirism, blood, abhuman, transmogrification, the uncanny.

The word 'vampire' has always secured a major place in the history of gothic literature. The word refers to a dark shadowy figure which rises from the grave, moves in the night to different places of human habitat in search of fresh blood to be sucked out of new victims for sustenance. A better understanding of the word could be achieved if we look into the origin of the word itself. Theresa Bane in her seminal work, Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology indicates,

The Vrykolaka ("Vampire" or wolf- fairy) possess the corpse of a person who died a violent death, was improperly buried, the Vrykolaka, a blood thirsty and ravenous thing, will ruthlessly attack by day or night.

(Bane, 148)

From the definition of the term 'vampire' in the Merriam Webster Dictionary as

The reanimated body of a dead person believed to come from the grave at night and suck the blood of persons asleep causing their death,

We can assume how a vampire becomes a reanimated body after death. In Whitney's Century Dictionary, a vampire is described as:

A kind of spectral body which, according to a superstition existing among the Slavic and other races ...Dead wizards, werewolves, heretics, and other outcasts become vampires, as do also the illegitimate offspring of parents themselves illegitimate, and anyone killed by a vampire.

These two definitions about the vampire however provide a space to look further into the missing links about the formation of the vampire. The vampire is a special kind of an organism that hovers around the space of life and death; it is a kind of the spectral other that becomes successful in disintegrating and transcending the form of the human body in order to adopt a further metamorphosed body known as the 'abhuman'. Kelly Hurley in her book *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* discussed the ways in which the abhuman is formed. A vampire may be taken as an example of an abhuman subject. Abhumanism on the part of a vampire can be effective on two levels; one, the transformation of a vampire from a human being mostly at midnight, and; two, on becoming a vampire with its disturbances and exploitation on human beings to fulfil its psychological and physical demands. A vampire's chief victims are young, beautiful, innocent and chaste females. At night, a vampire arises from its dark grave and makes rounds of the house of an innocent lady who is asleep. The vampire would love to insert two of its sharp canines on the victim's neck to make fresh blood ooze out into its mouth. In this way the vampire recharges its life by filling the dearth of sap in its undead body with a fresh flow of blood. Each night the vampire likes to find a new victim to collect the vital resources of its life. J. Gordon Melton in his seminal work

The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead, has treated the issue of bloodsucking of innocent girls by a vampire from a psychoanalytical point of view. Melton argues that human blood possesses mysterious power, and the act of sucking blood in the imagistic sense hints at the fulfilment of forbidden sexualized longings.

Count Dracula is already dead, but his thoughts and dreams are still unfulfilled, and so they are analogous and meaningful to their context of blood sucking. In the novel, Mina Harker is a human being who was attacked by Count Dracula not only for fresh blood but also for the gratification of desire. This gratification of carnal pleasure had lost its possibility of actuation in reality, for the Count was already dead. Stoker might have thought about an issue of the continuity of an evil desire while composing the character of Dracula and so he may have skilfully infused the element of the desire of the undead in the transformed body of Dracula. In the abhuman form it is possible to enjoy all kinds of pleasure and therefore the Count gratifies his unconscious desire with a relationship with Mina.

With the abhuman quality attached to its being, a vampire can land into an 'open space' where it can commit unlimited crimes due to its freedom from human limitations. What is impossible in the human form is quite easily possible in the abhuman form and the new form is much more multifunctional, improved, sophisticated and unlimited compared to the previous one. Abhumanism being a process of a transcendence, a literal deconstruction even, of the human form, with it the limit of death can be easily surpassed. With the 'conditions of the body' being absent, there emerges a scope for an interplay between life and death.

That Dracula is a supernatural criminal is true. The Victorian society was notorious for numerous bloody crimes. Keeping the social context of the Victorian times in mind when crimes of bloody acts were common, we can place Dracula in this context. In the introductory part of this chapter, some of the reasons behind the rise of criminals have already been mentioned. Following the roots of criminal anthropology, Dracula can be categorized as a

biological mutation of the human body with an abhuman colour. Dracula's violence is a spectacle of horror that is related to Freud's 'The Uncanny'. Freud, in a study on E. Jentsch referred to the effects of 'The Uncanny' and said that "these excite in the spectator the feeling that automatic, mechanical processes are at work, concealed beneath the ordinary appearance of animation" (Freud, 31). With the notion of the Uncanny, Dracula's transformation from a human to an abhuman may be analysed. The immediate effect of a painful sensation transports the human mind to an unexpected realm of violence where the human mind is left awestruck. Jonathan Harker cannot believe his own eyes when he begins to see the change of a human being changing gradually into a vampire in Dracula. Jack Morgan who in his book *The Biology of Horror* has provided us with an analysis of the biological aspect of Dracula's horror,

Humans are chilled by encounters with unhumanized, characterless aspects of life...

Horror monstrosities typically carry primarily the threat to pollute and infect, or they epitomize a repugnant and nauseating organicism, a fleshy stupidity. When Jonathan Harker finds the satiated Dracula lying indolently in a castle chamber, his reaction is one of abhorrence: On the Count's lips "were gouts of fresh blood. . . . he lay like a filthy leech"

(Morgan, 100)

Dracula's criminal behaviour may also be analysed through an application of Cesare Lombroso's theory on criminology expressed in the book *Criminal Man*. Lombroso in this work narrates an incident of a successful study on a criminal named Vilela, also known as the Italian Jack the Ripper, by a young doctor at the Asylum in Pavia. Lombroso notes that the doctor,

Thus was explained the origin of the enormous jaws, strong canines, prominent zygomae, and strongly developed orbital arches which he had so frequently remarked

in criminals...all these characteristics pointed to one conclusion, the atavistic origin of the criminal, who reproduces physical, psychic, and functional qualities of remote ancestors.

(Lombroso, 6-8)

In the novel, Dracula's physical traits are described in Jonathan Harker's Journal as:

His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that ... The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.

(Stoker, 19-20)

Everything that we get to know about Dracula's behaviour is from letters, journals and the notes of the different characters in the novel. Jonathan Harker is an English solicitor who visits Count Dracula's estate with a request from his employer Mr. Peter Hawkins. Harker had made some preliminary readings on the place named Transylvania and came to know that the place was mysterious and extremely wild. Somehow Jonathan managed to gather a little bit of detail of Dracula's place of living;

I find ...Transylvania, Moldavia, and Bukovina, in the midst of the Carpathian Mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe.

(Stoker, 2)

To reach Dracula's castle, Jonathan had to cross alien lands that were unusually deserted and far away from human habitat. Jonathan never understood that this voyage would bring disaster to his life; but his wife had guessed that this voyage was going to be ominous. That Jonathan had an intuition that he was going to be involved in a mysterious trap is clear

with the line: “I read that every known superstition in the world...were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool; if so my stay may be very interesting” (Stoker, 2). The man’s journey to the castle is also very important as it imaginatively helps us to compare between human and supernatural habitat. Located in the cold, bleak, snow-covered Carpathian Mountains, the castle itself is a place where nothing but death prevails. Jonathan had travelled by train, crossed many old stations, met with many people dressed unusually, until he had reached a hotel named the Golden Krone referred to him by Count Dracula. Shrouded with mist and fog with minimal light, surrounded by creepy trees, and located in a nightmarish atmosphere, the place appeared awful to be for Jonathan. A dog had barked peculiarly all the night, but Jonathan had slept till late in the morning. However, Jonathan’s stay here before his reaching the castle of Count Dracula had given him an uneasy and eerie feeling which he thought best not to disclose to Mina. Thus, on 5th May, Jonathan shifted him to the castle of the Count. Every now and then he had a feeling that something unnatural was waiting for him. People around him were murmuring and he overheard some unpleasant words from them:

I must say they were not cheering to me, for amongst them were ‘Ordog’—Satan, ‘pokol’—hell, ‘stregoica’... (Mem., I must ask the Count about these superstitions.)

(Stoker, 6)

The description of the journey to the castle is extremely noteworthy since it provides an impression of the supernatural setting and of the fearful castle of Dracula:

I could see from the flash of our lamps... from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky.

(Stoker, 10-15)

The high and erect conical endings with small gutters and creeks of the castle made it look like a hungry evil spirit making smiling indecently towards an ordinary human completely unaware of the evil deeds and unnatural happenings which do take place within the castle. An eagerness

and a fascination for the unknown became a ceaseless desire in the mind of Jonathan. This functioned as a driving force that pushed him forward.

The Count's behaviour towards Jonathan was however extremely hospitable. He himself carried Jonathan's luggage as no one was available at the time when Jonathan had made his entry. But the countenance of Dracula and, his physique had made Jonathan feel very uneasy. This is made evident by the lines:

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight
... on his own side of the fireplace.

(Stoker, 20)

Dracula is not perceived to be a vampire until the Jonathan comes to read certain mysterious papers left scattered on a table inside the castle. However Dracula's transformation into a vampire from a human being (although suspicious) reveals two important issues, first the transformation of a human being to a gothic being, and second the exploration of the concept of the abject. By extension, Dracula's transformation into a vampire further reveals that his unconscious desires are to be exposed in those forms never possible through civilized appearances. Before twelve o' clock at night Dracula behaves like a humble host, but after twelve he is completely transformed into a vampire. When the untransformed Dracula saw a bit of fresh blood dipping out of a cut in the hand of his guest his behaviour began to show signs of abnormality, and Dracula's carnal thirst for blood is hinted at just at that moment. Jonathan of course had been by no means prepared beforehand to believe that his otherwise genial host was a vampire, even though people had told him about Dracula's supernatural deeds. It was only when the man Jonathan read about the different facts written about Dracula, only then did he become aware that he was living with a supernatural being. Watching his host Dracula transforming into a vampire, Jonathan develops a contradiction between belief and

disbelief. This contradiction is the consequence of watching a spectacle of gothic horror that enforces strong disturbances in the psychological state of a human being like Jonathan.

Jonathan in fact shudders from a human fear incited by an abhuman. As Jonathan says, I had hung my shaving-glass by the window, I could hardly believe that it was ever there.

(Stoker, 28)

This indicates how the innocent guest cannot believe his own eyes to see his host transformed into a vampire. The reactions of Jonathan are noteworthy as they reflect the ongoing thought processes in his mind, set off by the unnatural happenings.

The visuals of broken walls with cracks also enhance Jonathan's fear; and having seen all these fearful sights, the innocent man starts to hover between the realms of belief and disbelief. However fear and excitement mounts to a climax as the man ultimately sees the dead Dracula lying in a coffin.

Continually crushed by his fear of Dracula, every ounce of rationality begins to seep out from the mind of Jonathan. Jonathan cannot believe his own eyes, a fact that reveals that a conscious mind cannot accept elements of fear in the unconscious. The view of the Gothic being, the material of the coffin, the bloodless face of Dracula gives a rude shock to the psyche of the innocent man. Dracula is dead surely, yet he is very much alive with his threats. After meeting Dracula face to face, the man is also psychologically traumatised with nightmares in which he sees Dracula.

Works Cited

Primary Texts:

Skal, David. J. (Ed.) *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996. Print.

Secondary Texts:

Bane, Theresa. *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology*. North Carolina and London: MacFarland and Company, Inc. 2010, Print.

Bhabha, Homi.K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994, Print.

Breunig, Charles. *The Age of Revolution and Reaction 1789-1850*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970, Print.

Bunson, Matthew. *The Vampire Encyclopedia*. New York: Gramercy Books, 1993, Print.

Cavallaro, Dani. *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear*. New York and London: Continuum, 2002, Print.

Haldar Shantwana. *Mary Shelley Frankenstein, A Reader's Companion*. New Delhi: ABP, 2004, Print.

Lombroso, Cesare. *Criminal Man*. New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1911.

McLintock, David. (Trans.). *Sigmund Freud the Uncanny*. London: Penguin, 2003, Print.

Melton, J. Gordon. *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*. United States of America: Visible Ink Press, 2011, Print.

Morgan, Jack. *The Biology of Horror: Gothic Literature and Film*. United States of America: Southern Illinois University, 2002, Print.

Punter David. *The Literature of Terror, a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. Harlow: Longman, 1996.

Punter, David and Glennis Byron. *The Gothic*. Malden, USA: Blackwell, 2004, Print.

Stephanou, Aspasia. Reading Vampire Gothic through Blood: Bloodlines. New York:

Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, Print.

Sterrenburg, Lee. "Mary Shelley's Monster: Politics and Psyche". George Levine and U. C.

Knoepfelmacher. (Eds.) The Endurance of Frankenstein. London: University of California Press, 1979.

Sterrenburg, Lee. The Endurance of Frankenstein. London: University of California Press, 1979.

Torro, Del Guillermo and Chuck Hogan (Eds.) the Night Eternal. London: Harper Collins, 2011, Print.

Webster, Merriam. Dictionary, Eleventh Edn. 2004, Print.

Whitney, William Dwight. The Century Dictionary. New York: Century Co. 1891.